

Opposition grows to GM Canada pattern contract

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Amid growing panic in the ranks of the Unifor bureaucracy that the sell-out “Framework Agreement” narrowly passed at GM Canada will not be accepted by workers at Fiat-Chrysler and Ford, the *Windsor Star* published a piece on October 3 entitled “Unifor’s Ford Oakville Local Breaks Ranks in Auto Talks.”

As many autoworkers have already noted, the article is transparently designed to buttress the concessionary demands of the auto companies, union President Jerry Dias, and Unifor’s Master Bargaining Committees.

Ostensibly reporting on the announcement by Unifor Oakville Local 707 President Dave Thomas that his local bargaining committee “will not support a deal similar to the one struck with General Motors,” the *Star* was at pains to highlight the position of both the auto bosses and Dias that workers face an either-or proposition—either accept yet another miserable contract or more jobs will be lost.

In the case of Ford autoworkers, the current lack of new product commitments from Ford Canada at both the Windsor Engine and Essex Engine plants is being used as a bludgeon in an attempt to intimidate workers and force through the GM framework pattern. Thus, the *Star* gives pride of place to the view of industry analyst and auto company shill Tony Faria that the opposition to the GM deal amongst Ford workers will undermine efforts to maintain jobs. “So much for union solidarity,” concludes Faria.

Indeed, this line has also been the one pushed by Dias and his team of union bureaucrats for a year and more. The goal of the union in this round of bargaining is to “maintain the Canadian auto manufacturing footprint” and to heck with the ten years of massive concessions imposed on the membership whilst the Detroit Three have raked in huge profits to line the pockets of their shareholders and executives.

Of course, the argument that concessions save jobs has been shown over the years to be nothing but a lie. The thousands of workers tossed onto the scrap heap at Ford St. Thomas, GM Windsor Transmission, GM Oshawa Truck, Oshawa Consolidated and even those on current layoff at Ford’s engine plants can attest to that.

Next up to bat in the *Star*’s article is Dias lieutenant Chris Taylor, the Windsor Ford Local 200 president and chair of the union’s Ford master bargaining committee. “I think Oakville understands clearly that our position is very precarious to say the least, just as it was at their site when they lost the Windstar and truck plant. As a local president, you have to do what’s right on behalf of our members, but you have to do what’s best for the industry.” Taylor neglects to say that the horrendous series of contracts forced down the throats of autoworkers only “did best” for the auto companies. In any case, the newspaper gives Taylor the last word in the article. Rejecting the GM pattern, he says, would be “short-sighted”.

The *Windsor Star*’s labour reporters have for decades made whole careers out of soliciting the opinions from this or that union official, corporate executive or “industry analyst.” But one has always been at a loss to see featured the comments and perspectives of the rank and file. Yet even a cursory examination of worker remarks at the plant gates of FCA and Ford, on their rank-and-file social media pages and even on Unifor’s own official AutoTalks2016 Facebook page shows a massive groundswell of opposition to the GM framework pattern negotiated and recommended by Dias.

It is into this growing maelstrom that Ford Oakville Local President Thomas released his statement opposing the GM pattern. Thomas clearly represents a

section of the Unifor leadership that is growing increasingly uneasy not only with Dias' flagging support, but also with the consequences of pushing through the GM pattern for their own careers. In subsequent statements to the press, Thomas singled out the unsatisfactory ten-year second-tier "grow-in" period as a significant obstacle to securing ratification. In Oakville about 2,200 of the 5,000 workers fall into the second tier.

In his official statement, Thomas was at pains to avoid criticism of the sell-out at GM. "The members at GM" wrote Thomas, "were in a very difficult position especially in Oshawa with no future investment planned for that site. GM's (union) leadership had some very difficult decisions to make and they believe they did what was best for their members."

In fact, the Unifor bureaucrats view their task not as serving the rank and file but as ensuring the automakers more profitable conditions than those in the US, and for the past three decades have assisted the automakers in pitting workers in Canada and the US against each other in a race to the bottom.

Determined to prevent a strike, Unifor announced a tentative settlement at GM that was no more than a "framework." As for the "future investments" touted by Dias, GM workers are still in the dark about them. Most are nothing more than promises to direct unreliable "overflow" production to GM Canada plants.

The growing opposition to Unifor's pattern agreement demonstrates the readiness of autoworkers to mount a counteroffensive against the auto bosses. But if they are to mount a successful fight against all job cuts and concessions, abolish two-tier wages, and restore decent wages, benefits, pensions and working conditions, autoworkers must break politically and organizationally from the nationalist, pro-capitalist Unifor.

Autoworkers should build rank-and-file committees independent of the Unifor apparatus to spearhead an industry-wide strike and fight to rally workers in the US and Mexico in a united struggle to assert the common interests of all workers for decent jobs and pay. In this fight, the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworkers Newsletter* will offer every assistance possible.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* will hold an

information call-in meeting to organize the fight to unite autoworkers in Canada and the US against all job cuts and concessions on Wednesday, October 5 at 7:00 pm Eastern Time. To participate, dial 438-800-2937 in Canada and 213-416-1560 in the US and enter PIN 581 991 086#.



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